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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, January 28, 1942

Subject: "Egg Grades." Information from marketing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Of course you know it's a good idea to serve eggs often to your family. You know eggs are a mighty valuable food -- good tasting, good looking, and packed with nutritive value -- proteins, vitamins, and minerals. But you may often wonder which of the different eggs for sale at your store is the best buy for you. And you may wonder, too, how much of the weekly food budget should go for eggs.

You want nutritious food for you family. No question about that. Also you want food priced to fit your budget.

Eggs at the store differ a lot in quality and size and price, and which of these eggs are the best buy for you depends upon what you want to use the eggs for, how big your budget is, what your other expenses are, and lots of other things.

But let's consider some of the points that make a difference in eggs -- the points that make some eggs justly higher priced than others. Certain characteristics about an egg -- about its shell, the yolk, the white, and the size of the air cell determine the quality of an egg. Those are the things the U. S. Department of Agriculture inspectors watch for when they grade eggs. They've figured out the standards for the various grades on the basis of the sale value of the eggs. So naturally these points of quality are just what you should look for when you buy eggs for your family.

For the almost perfect egg the Federal grade name is U. S. Special or Retail

Grade AA. All eggs in this grade must have clean, normal and sound shells, first of all. Inside, these eggs must have all the physical qualities that usually make an egg tops in flavor -- the yolk must be well-rounded, well-centered, and the white firm and clear -- so firm that it will have a tendency to hold the yolk in the center. Then, of course, as you cook the U. S. Special egg, there's a lot greater chance that the yolk won't break.

But U. S. Special eggs are so nearly perfect, only a few of them are on the market. When you can get them, the U. S. Special eggs are fit for folks with the most demanding tastes, for invalids or others who need delicacies in food.

The next highest grade, which is the highest quality you can buy on most markets, is also of fine quality. The grade name used to identify these fine eggs is U. S. Extras, or Retail Grade A. Eggs graded A or Extra have yolks fairly well-centered and whites that are firm and clear. The shell is normal, sound and clean. It's a fine egg for all table purposes -- soft or hard-cooked, poached, or fried.

Next lower on the Federal egg grade scale are U. S. Standards or Retail Grade B. These eggs are adaptable for general table and cooking uses. They'd be good for your cakes and puddings. The quality isn't as good as for the two top grades, but they are good. The white is reasonably firm and clear, and the yolk won't have any serious defects.

You know the shell on an egg hides most of the all-important signs of quality from the ordinary shopper. But the experts who grade eggs find out about the inside of the egg by "candling." That is, they hold each egg up before a bright light. You might say that they X-ray each egg to get at the inside characteristics.

After the Government graders candle the eggs, they see that the eggs in any one carton are all of the same grade. Then the cartons are sealed with a label that states the grade, the date of grading, and the size of the eggs.

All of these points are important. The date of grading is important to you as well as the grade. You'll notice that you'll get the eggs in your stores very soon after the date of grading. The size of the egg has nothing to do with its grade -- but it has lots to do with the amount of egg you get for your money. Graded eggs are marked large, medium, or small. If they're large, they must weigh 24 ounces or more to the dozen, if medium, 20 1/2 ounces, and if small, 17 ounces to the dozen. So size makes lots of difference.

Now, just which of all these eggs is right for you to buy is a question for you to decide. But here's a tip -- you'll probably save money if you buy the higher grades for your most particular eating and the others for dishes where eggs are one of a number of foods in a mixture. For a poached or boiled egg at breakfast you may want a finer egg than for a one-egg cake mixture.

But no matter which eggs you buy, you'll want to take good care of them. Don't buy more than a week's supply at a time, and keep them in the refrigerator or some other place where they are constantly cold. If eggs are kept where it's warm, or if they're handled a lot or roughly, they soon lose their freshness. And keep eggs away from other foods that have strong odors, such as citrus fruits, onions and various vegetables. Egg yolks take up odors very quickly.

Now about storage eggs. All the eggs this country needs can't be fresh eggs. The hens just don't lay steadily the year around. In the spring they lay lots more than we usually need right then, and at some other times, the laying is a little slack. Anyway, storage eggs have just about the same qualities as fresh eggs -- that is, if they're properly stored. So don't think a storage egg is inferior just because it's a storage egg. If storage eggs are sold as U. S. Extras, the grade seal will look just as it does for fresh eggs except that the seal will also tell you that the eggs have been held in storage. In the U. S. Standard grade, storage eggs need not be labeled as storage eggs. But then neither can they be labeled "Fresh eggs." If they are, they're mislabeled according to the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1938.

You see why it's a good idea to buy eggs according to grade. In this way you can get the egg that fits **your** cooking needs and stretch your food dollars.

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